

Self-Defense by oogonium

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Characters: Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers, Kali Prasad, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Steve Harrington, The Stranger Things Kids

Relationships: Kali Prasad & Max Mayfield, Kali Prasad & Steve Harrington

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Summary:

Kali remembers having to learn self-defense the hard way, elbows to chin, knees to groin, tooth and nail until only one person was left standing. There's only so much your powers can do when someone's already dead set on tearing you to shreds. This is why, when she sees Max sitting alone on the Byers' front porch checking the bruises around her wrists, she promises herself that these girls will *never* have to learn the hard way.

Self-Defense

Author's Note:

Fave three characters doing one of my fave things-learning how to not take any more crap. Sorry it's a bit short, I'm sick and it's 3 a.m. hahh

"How come you know self-defense anyway?" Max still doesn't look one hundred percent convinced on the idea of Kali being any kind of teacher. She simply shrugs at the redhead, knowing there aren't any solid answers that would satisfy her curiosity. "You never know when it'll come in handy," she squares her shoulders and widens her stance, "now let's see that right hook again."

The boys only bother checking in every now and then, too busy gathering firewood for what they've promised her will be the "most badass campfire of the century". She doesn't doubt their enthusiasm, but she does resent their stealing El to use her powers just a *little* bit (which of course, she would never voice aloud seeing her sister giggle in delight at the boys' antics). She makes Max run drills until the girl collapses dramatically on the grass, refusing to get up for *at least* ten minutes. In the spirit of compromise, Kali gives her five and gets her a drink of water from inside the house. As she sits down next to her she catches Max looking at her bruises again, her wristwatch laying on the ground next to her. She hands over the glass, making sure to avoid eye contact,

"It won't always be like this, you know?"

Max snorts, "You mean you won't always work me to death when I'm supposed to be enjoying my break?" She looks up at the younger girl, refusing to take the bait.

"You know what I mean." pressing on as Max looks away, "One day-one day you'll get out of there and find a family that deserves you-that can save you. A family that deserves saving." They both look over at El and the boys, laughing as they chase each other with the sticks they're supposed to be collecting. Max only nods once, shoulders pushed back, head a little higher.

"Let's keep going."

Kali makes sure to be gentle as she helps her put the watch back on.

They're in the middle of a particularly difficult move as noon hits, the insistent sun rising to the top of the sky. Max is doing well with her punches and blocks, but it seems she's hit a wall when it comes to breaking someone's grip. She rips her forearm from Kali's grasp, angrily shoving her hair out of her face. "That's it. I'm done!" She pulls out the ponytail at the top of her head, rubbing at her scalp.

"You can do this, Max. You've almost got it."

She laughs humorlessly, "No Kali, I *don't* almost have it. I don't have it at all." she rubs at her wrist, "it's not like this was going to work anyway..."

It may be the look in Max's eyes, it may be the way her shoulders have sloped down again, it may be the fact that Kali is stubborn at her best and absolutely fucking impossible at her worst, but something inside her decides that by the end of today, Max Mayfield will have a much more realistic idea of what she can and cannot do.

"Steve!" He turns around from the lawn chair where he's "supervising" the kids, pulling his shades down to watch Kali beckoning him over. "What is it?" he yells, not moving an inch. Kali doesn't have to look at Max to know she's also rolling her eyes. She tries to stop the sarcasm dripping from her voice as she retorts, "Max needs to see how a pro does it!" She's careful to ignore Max's confused gaze, doing her best to not reveal what she's thinking as they watch Steve reluctantly walk over to their patch of grass.

"What's up buttercup?" he asks ruffling Max's hair and *trying* to ruffle Kali's as well. She bats his hand away, her face still blank.

"Max, watch from the side, try to keep your eyes on how my hands move from step to step." She takes the soda can from Steve's hand, placing it down on the grass and then pushes his shoulders back so he

falls into a better stance. He seems to catch on quickly and brings his hands up in front of him, ready to block her first move. Before he can flinch, she plucks his shades off and folds them, handing them to Max. She grins at Steve, "Whenever you're ready, Harrington." He scoffs and mumbles something about starting too early before squaring his shoulders and pulling one fist back. As quickly as she can, Kali blocks his fist and begins to run through the first few moves she's taught Max, finishing with another swift jab to the chest. When she turns around, Max is looking at her wide-eyed, hands hanging at her sides. "There's no way I can do that." Kali takes the shades from her, shaking her head. "You can do it. You just need to *see* that you can do it." She gently pushes her in front of a flustered Steve, crossing her arms.

"Do your best to remember what we went over. When in doubt, just S.I.N.G."

"Sing?" Steve asks, his brows furrowing. Kali simply looks at Max who, after gathering her resolve, turns to him ready for a demonstration. They start slow, Max jabbing at the designated spots while murmuring to herself, "Solar plexus, instep, nose, groin. Solar plexus, instep, nose, groin..." she begins to move from step to step more smoothly, until she's running through the drill almost seamlessly, with Steve doing his best to catch up. Eventually, they move back to grips, and for a moment she sees a hint of fear invade Max's eyes. It's only Steve's slight hesitation that breaks her trance, though, his head nodding oh-so-slightly, making sure Max is comfortable with where they're going. She nods back once and the drills start over again.

By the time the sun sets, Max has not only figured out how to break grips, but how to use Steve's weight and strength against him. Kali doesn't bother fighting back the proud grin on her face as she watches Max successfully flip on top of Steve, twisting his arm behind him and pressing his face into the ground with her foot. When they finally break away from each other, she can see the exact same grin on Harrington's face as well. He carefully hangs his shades on this collar before ruffling Max's hair one last time, "You did good, Red, that asshole won't know what hit him" and instead of looking

annoyed, Kali is pleased to see a new glint in Max's eyes as she grins up at a dirt-stained Steve.

The huge campfire really does seem to reflect an entire day's work, roaring brightly as the kids, Joyce, and Hopper all gather around to enjoy the night. While she splits a slightly burnt s'more with El, she sees Max mimicking what she's learned with Lucas trying to copy her. She doesn't say anything, but she enjoys the swell of pride blooming in her chest, happy to have better memories of what it means to be a fighter.